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JOHN BAPTIST LE VAN BA

**The Social Dimension of Grace
A study on Karl Rahner's Theology**

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Prof. Doutor João Eleutério**

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Introduction

The main discussion in this paper is the social dimension of grace in Karl Rahner. We do not think grace can be separated into personal grace and social grace; rather they are two dimensions of the same grace of God, which Karl Rahner describes in one term God's self-communication (grace). In this paper, we will emphasize more the social dimension of grace, which we find implied in God's self-communication (grace) as suggested by Karl Rahner.

Karl Rahner was a Jesuit priest, one of the great Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. "He was born in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, on March 5, 1904. He died in Innsbruck, Austria, on March 30, 1984."¹ At the core of "Rahner's thought is a coherent vision of the world as the profoundly mysterious arena of God's self-communication in Jesus and the Spirit."² Before going on to discuss the social dimension of grace as God's self-communication to human beings and the world in Karl Rahner, we must see the traditional understanding of the notion of grace.

Grace is a term that we can find in the English New Testament and it is "always a translation of *χάρις* (charis)", the word of *χάρις* in both biblical and secular Greek has "more meanings than can be represented by any one term in English": gracefulness, loveliness, joy, graciousness, favor, gratitude, thanks, etc.³

¹ Robert Masson, "Karl Rahner: A Brief Biography," *Karl Rahner Society*, (Marquette University: Marquette, n.d.), n.p., see <http://www.krs.stjohnsem.edu/KarlRahner.htm>. Accessed on February 10, 2012.

² *Ibid.*

³ Burton Scott Easton, "Grace," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, II, (Chicago: Howard-Severance Co., 1930): p. 290-292, see <http://www.bible-researcher.com/grace.html>. Accessed on February 10, 2012.

There is no word in Hebrew that can represent all the meanings of *χάρις* (charis), and in the Septuagint, *χάρις* (charis) itself is used, practically, only as a translation of the Hebrew *chen* (חֵן), *favor*, this restriction of meaning being due to the desire to represent the same Hebrew word by the same Greek word as far as possible.⁴

According to Augustine of Hippo, human beings cannot save themselves, only God alone can save them. He bases his statement namely on the quotation of the Gospel of John 15:5: “apart from me, you can do nothing.”⁵ God gives grace (*gratia*) to human beings for He wants them to be healed, forgiven, and restored. Grace is “God’s generous and quite unmerited attention to humanity, by which this process of healing may begin.”⁶ God created human beings as good creatures and they fell away from him. God, in “an act of grace”, came to save them. Therefore, human beings are justified as “an act of grace”. Salvation is a free gift given out of God’s love through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for sinners. For this, Augustine of Hippo concludes: “the basis of our justification is the divine promise of grace made to us.”⁷ We sinners have no right to claim justification, but it is “the gracious promise of God, received through faith.”⁸

Thomas Aquinas is the most important theologian who lays down “the medieval understanding of the nature and purpose of grace.”⁹ There are two types of grace: actual grace (grace which is free given - *gratia gratis data*) and habitual grace (grace which makes pleasing - *gratia gratis faciens*).¹⁰ Because of the fall, there is a great gulf between God and humanity. Human nature is so weakened and corrupted that God cannot dwell there. God

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 290-292.

⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, (Blackwell: Victoria, Australia, n.d.), p. 365.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 336-337.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 369-370.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 369-370.

gives us a special, permanent grace, a supernatural substance or infusion that changes our nature permanently so that we become acceptable to God, so that He can again dwell in us. Thomas Aquinas called this special grace habitual grace (habitual = permanent).¹¹

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives to us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of internal life.”¹² Here we can see grace is supernatural gift of salvation given to human through Jesus Christ, which changes sinners to become God’s adoptive sons and grace invites them to share God’s divine life.¹³ Grace also “is the first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us” and this grace of the Holy Spirit helps us to “associate with his works” for the salvation of others and the growth of the Church, Christ’s Body.¹⁴

As we know that grace belongs to supernatural order, its effect is diverse, but theologians and our traditional teaching give four main effects: The first is the liberation from sin. Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther have understood that grace liberates humans from sin. The release from sin must be understood within the context of an interpersonal relationship between God and each human person and the liberating effect of grace lies precisely in God’s acceptance.¹⁵ The second effect of grace is liberation to love. It means that “grace is God’s Spirit expanding freedom, opening it up, in a desire and impulse of love.”¹⁶ The third effect is “cooperative grace of God.”¹⁷ For this, Augustine of Hippo writes:

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 369-370.

¹² *The Catechism of Catholic Church*, (Doubleday: New York, 1995), No. 1996.

¹³ Charles R. Meyer, *A Contemporary Theology of Grace*, (The Society of St. Paul: Staten Island, 1971), p. 9.

¹⁴ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, (Doubleday: New York, 1995), No. 2003.

¹⁵ Roger Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 1979), p.140.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

“God operates, therefore, without us, in order that we will [love]; but when we will [love], and so will [love] that we may act, God co-operates with us.”¹⁸ The fourth effect of grace is participation in God’s life.

“In the twentieth century no Catholic theologian has done more than Karl Rahner to restore the theology of grace to its position close to the center of Christian faith.”¹⁹ According to Roger Haight, Karl Rahner has “most effectively transformed the theology of grace in Catholic theology”²⁰ in our time. There are four points on Karl Rahner’s theology of grace as below:

First, we have already mentioned above that Thomas Aquinas says that the term grace has double meanings, here Roger Haight explains this “double meanings” in a comparison with Karl Rahner’s point of view: one is the “created grace” (sanctifying grace), which is “as a habit or quality of the human souls infused by God”²¹ and the other is “uncreated grace,”²² which is God Himself. This uncreated grace “was present to and dwelt in the human person.”²³ Rahner, says Haight, “reverses the relationship between created and uncreated grace.”²⁴ According to Rahner, “grace is first and foremost God’s self-communication and presence to human existence.”²⁵ This simple reverse “completely reorients one’s thinking about grace and opens up the possibility of interpersonal categories to analyze it.”²⁶

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 433.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 433-434.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

Second, grace is a gift, a self-offer as “constitutive of the actual condition of human existence.”²⁷ Grace is supernatural. It does not mean that “it comes to a purely self-enclosed human nature as an alien, arbitrary, and merely additional factor of human condition.”²⁸ Rather, the grace of God is as “an offer of salvation,” and it is “a part of the historical condition of human existence.”²⁹ This is God’s will for human salvation from the very beginning.³⁰

Third, Rahner supports “the universality of grace on the basis of the universality of God’s saving will.”³¹ Rahner opens the boundary of the salvific sphere to the whole world even to other religions. The salvific grace is not merely enclosed in the Christian sphere. There is no more “the barriers separating the church and the world” and it also “unveils to Christian vision a kingdom of grace beyond the (visible) church.”³²

Fourth, if we think that because grace, which is supernatural, cannot be experienced, Karl Rahner then “holds that people do experience grace.”³³ For this, Roger Haight says that “Rahner has turned the theology of grace to a consideration of the very nature of salvation and how it is experienced in human nature.”³⁴

With those keywords of Karl Rahner on grace, we are going to divide our work in two main parts: the first part is the the history of salvation and revelation and the world history. In this part, we will divide into four main points which are (1) The history of salvation and

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 434.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

revelation as coextensive with the whole world, (2) The necessary historical and social mediation of salvation, (3) Jesus Christ, God's self-communication to mankind and the world in grace, (4) The Church as prime example of social dimension of grace. The second part is social dimension of grace. In this second part, we will divide this dissertation into three main points, which are (1) God's self-communication or "social trinity", (2) Social dimension of grace and the purpose of human freedom, (3) The social dimension of grace in the context of collective eschatology.

Although we divide the dissertation into two main parts, both actually continue and support each other as one unity, which makes clear our purpose: the social dimension of grace in Karl Rahner.

1 Revelation and History

We know that in the very beginning, God created our first parents - Adam and Eve who represent humankind. God gave them universal grace, which we also call original justice, including freedom. Our first parents failed to keep the original justice and consequently, they let sin conquer their life and so humankind inherited original sin. God did not abandon them and their children, but he planned to save humankind by revealing himself as savior. Karl Rahner calls this act of self-revelation the act of God self-communicating to humankind and the world in grace. This is not an act that happens at one time and is finished, it includes all acts taking place in history, which we call the history of salvation or the history of God's self-communication to humankind. This is also the history of God's grace for human beings and the world. However, how does this history of God's grace work? How does God's grace affect the whole society? For these questions, we try to show the answer given by Karl Rahner. We introduce his vision in four steps : first, the history of salvation and revelation as coexistent with the history of the whole world, second, the necessary historical and social mediation of salvation, third, Jesus Christ, God's self-communication to mankind and the world in grace, and the last point is the Church as prime example of social grace.

1.1 The History of Salvation and Revelation as Coextensive with the Whole World

God reveals himself to save human beings and the world. This self-revelation has its own history, which we call the salvation history. It is no doubt to say that the salvation

history is truly the history of God's self-revelation. Although God's self-revelation history is different from world history, it does not happen outside the history of the world. They are coexistent with history of the whole world.

1.1.1 History of Salvation and World History

In *The Dictionary of Theology* organized and edited by Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler, salvation history can be understood in different ways: first, it is presented as God's universal saving will. It can be said that God has "graciously embraced the whole of human history and in it has offered all men his salvation and that his grace and justification have been concretely and historically realized in humanity."³⁵ Second, salvation history also means "the history of these experiences and embodiments of salvation throughout the human race."³⁶ Finally, salvation history is understood as that "pre-Christian and extra-Christian experiences of salvation in space and time of salvation in Jesus Christ."³⁷

In a stricter sense, salvation history can be understood in a *special* and *official* way as described in the Scriptures. By special salvation history, one can distinguish the group salvation or "collective salvation"³⁸ and the personal salvation or "individual salvation"³⁹, although both have "in common a characteristic tangible structure: Covenant, Church, Old and New Testament."⁴⁰ The free acceptance is very important with the individual salvation. In freedom, God's self-communication to human beings in grace, but he also needs a free response from the human side. In the catholic point of view, the salvation history is not "a

³⁵ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler, *Dictionary of Theology*, (Crossroad: New York, 1985), p. 464.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

meta-history of faith but a genuine history coextensive with profane history.”⁴¹ It means that the salvation history is not an event out of our life, but it is historic events, which happen within the history of the world and can be experienced.

In this context, history takes on a new meaning, according to Karl Rahner, “salvation history takes places within the history of this world.”⁴² This gives us a new way of understanding when we are looking at the world where we are living and looking for our salvation. In fact, this assumption from Karl Rahner has several implications, as we shall demonstrate:

First, he wants to tell us that salvation is not something in the future, and something that has not yet come, but “salvation takes places now.”⁴³ It has already happened together within the history of the world. As we know that we human beings receive God’s grace, which is something given right now and we freely accept this grace, which can change ourselves in the moment. In the book *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Karl Rahner makes it clearer and he also gives us a hint to know in which moment the history of the world becomes the history of salvation, he writes:

“Anyone [who] does not close himself to God in an ultimate act of his life and his freedom through free and personal sin for which he is really and subjectively guilty and for which he cannot shirk responsibility, this person finds salvation. The history of the world, then, means the history of salvation.”⁴⁴

In conclusion, salvation does not come only from the past neither leads us only to a suppositious future, but it is also happening at the present.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

⁴² Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, V (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1966), p. 98.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁴⁴ Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 143.

Since “grace is basically God communicating himself to man” and “grace is really salvation itself,”⁴⁵ a second implication is that the salvation history within the history of the world also means that “the self-communication of God takes place in the form of that free acceptance of this communication which we call faith, hope and charity in the freedom of man.”⁴⁶ The freedom of man should be a freedom related to his salvation as Karl Rahner confirms: “Real freedom of the spirit of this world, in this world of the God of grace and of Christ, is always freedom regard to salvation or damnation and cannot be freedom in any other way.”⁴⁷ This creates a relationship between history of salvation and history of the world, for “the freedom of the corporeal, social and historical creature [is freedom] which always and necessarily exercised through an encounter with the world”, such as “encounters with one’s neighbor, with one’s historical task, with the so-called world of every-day life in and with what we call the history of the individual and communities.”⁴⁸ Or as he expresses elsewhere, “wherever human history is lived and suffered in freedom, the history of salvation and its opposite are also taking place.”⁴⁹

Thirdly, that salvation history takes place within the history of the world can be also understood as the salvation history that indeed lies “hidden in the profane history.”⁵⁰ We may think that if salvation is hidden in profane history, it must be secondary matter and is not as important as the profane history. However, Karl Rahner’s purpose is to tell us that salvation

⁴⁵ Idem, *Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, V (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1966) p. 98.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98-99.

⁴⁹ Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 144.

⁵⁰ Idem, *Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, V (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1966) p. 99.

history, by its nature, “works itself out in the dimension of profane history in which it takes place.”⁵¹ This also means that “salvation history goes its own quiet way and is quite indifferent to it, simply in the form of super-history or history of faith.”⁵² Karl Rahner, in the one hand, sees profane history as reproachful and disappointed, but on the other hand, he also recognizes it as a place where we can find *hint* or *signs* for salvation:

“In any cases, the whole profane history is disturbing, reproachful, and disappointed even in its own sphere, and anyone who asks for salvation and reckons with the possibility of a personal self-exposure will find that profane history contains hints and signs telling him where it is to be this salvation has taken place in his own history and where it is to be found.”⁵³

The universal history of salvation is also the history of revelation.⁵⁴

Before discussing the revelation in detail, it might be better to define the concept of revelation. First of all, what is different between natural revelation and God’s real self-revelation? According to Karl Rahner,

“If God creates something other than himself and thereby creates it as something finite, if God creates spirit which recognizes this other as finite through its transcendence and hence in view of its ground, and if therefore at the same time it differentiates this ground as qualitatively and wholly other from what is merely finite, and as ineffable and holy mystery, this already implies a certain disclosure of God as the infinite mystery. This is usually called the natural revelation of God.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵⁴ Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 144.

⁵⁵ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler, *Dictionary of Theology* (Crossroad: New York, 1985), p. 170.

In this *natural revelation*, God still remains unknown and “his ultimate and unambiguous relationship to spiritual creatures cannot be known in this way.”⁵⁶ Therefore, God decides to reveals himself to human being and Karl Rahner calls this “self-communion of God in grace.”⁵⁷ This revelation has two aspects: transcendental and historical, which are different but they belong together.⁵⁸ Here some more attention must be given to the historical aspect of revelation and to see how it goes together with the salvation history.

What has been discussed above is just a way to present the meaning of salvation history in relationship with history of the world, but in reality, salvation history and revelation history always join together, as what Karl Rahner describes below:

“There is no salvation, which could take place in any other way except in the faith of the person hearing the revelation. To this extent it is clear that the history of salvation and revelation is always the already existing synthesis of God’s historical activity and man’s at the same time.”⁵⁹

To make it clearer and to show us how salvation history and revelation belong together and coexist among each other, Karl Rahner affirms:

“The universal history of salvation, which as the categorical mediation of man’s supernatural transcendentality is coexistent with the history of the world, is also and at the same time the history of revelation. This too, then is coextensive with the whole history of the world and of revelation.”⁶⁰

This seemingly surprises those who have already set in their mind that the revelation just begins with Abraham and Moses. Karl Rahner never denies the revelation in Scriptures, but with him, there are two ways of revelation: one is the universal and supernatural

⁵⁶ Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 171-172.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171-172.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171-172.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

revelation and the other is special or Christian history of revelation,⁶¹ but our main point here is “the universal history of salvation is also the history of revelation”. Once again, according to Karl Rahner,

“It is not only the history of salvation, but also the history of revelation in the proper sense takes place wherever the individual and collective history of human race is taking place.”⁶²

What we try to prove from the very first beginning up to now is to confirm Karl Rahner’s point of view on “the history of salvation and revelation as coextensive with the whole world history.” As what Karl Rahner describes below:

“Now the history of humankind as understood in this way, the history of man’s spirit and of his freedom, the thematic or un-thematic history of his salvation as coextensive with the history of the world, this history is also in the proper sense the history of supernatural revelation. It is ultimate ground in God’s supernatural self-communication to man in grace, and it is in service of God’s self-communication to man in grace.”⁶³

Before concluding this part, it is important to notice: there are distinctions between the history of salvation and of revelation and the history of the world. What we need to know is that although Karl Rahner refers the distinctions between the history of salvation and the profane history, he just wants to emphasize that both of them cannot mingle to each other; they exist in the same field:

“Salvation history is silent about profane history, leaves its questions open ones and lets the cockle grows with the wheat without trying to make any clear-cut distinctions between them.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁶⁴ Idem, *The Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, V (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1966), p. 110.

This reminds us to Augustine's teaching about mixing of the holiness and sinfulness in the Church, where we can find product of both salvation and profane history: "The Church is *not* a society of saints, but a "mixed body" of saints and sinners."⁶⁵

The contribution of Karl Rahner is the way to discern salvation history from profane history and freedom is the key for this discernment. God's self-communication to us in grace calls for our free response. The moment we freely accept God's self-communication, we start our salvation history. On the contrary, we remain in profane history. For this, we need to have a careful attitude about profane history, if we do not want to say that we need to respect to it. Because we do not know in which moment it will "put on" God's self-communication and it will become salvation history. From this point of view, we renew our thought of profane history where we are living and struggling with our freedom, where we may see full of sins, but it depends on God's self-communication in grace to humankind and we are free to response to God, it may be changed into salvation history in a moment. Once he confirms that the salvation history does not happen outside human history, Karl Rahner truly leaves a door open for dialogue with the world. God constantly comes to human beings in history and through history. God communicates to human beings on both universal and particular level. He reveals his self-communication in love with human in a special space and time through his son, Jesus Christ. From then on, it begins a new era of God self-communication in grace to humans and to the world. Christ, through his death and resurrection, establishes an official Church in the mist of profane history. He wants his Church become salt and light for this profane world. Because of this, the Church now becomes an official historical and social mediation of salvation.

⁶⁵Alister E. MacGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, (Blackwell: Victoria, Australia, 2007), p. 396.

1.2 The Necessary Historical and Social Mediation of Salvation

According to M. Fisher, Karl Rahner makes an argument for the ecclesial nature of Christianity, which is based on his transcendental theology. M. Fisher repeats Karl Rahner's idea: "*God's transcendental* call to human beings is not just a call to individuals, but to the essence of humanity—including humanity's communal and social dimension."⁶⁶ The essence of humanity is addressed only by a religion that comes from God, and is not a merely human projection. Because it comes from God who is self-communication, the Church as a religion belongs to the necessary historical and social mediation of salvation.⁶⁷

1.2.1 The Necessary Institutional Mediation of Religion in Christianity⁶⁸

As we know that Christ himself is the absolute mediator of salvation, the opening of the reign of God and it is also the eschatological climax of salvation history. Christ's salvation history continues "through the community of those who believe in him, who recognize him explicitly as the mediator of salvation in profession of faith, is what we call Church."⁶⁹ Karl Rahner calls this Church is "the institutional constitution of the religion of the absolute mediator of salvation."⁷⁰ Because Christianity is the religion of the absolute mediator, it also calls itself the absolute religion. This means that this religion is a "necessary institutional mediation of religion"⁷¹ for all men in the world. For this, Karl Rahner writes:

⁶⁶ Mark F. Fisher, *Rahner Foundation of Christian Faith: A Paraphrase of the Foundations of Christian Faith with Introduction and Indices*, (Crossword Publishing Company: n.p., 2005), p. 343. See <http://www.pastoralcouncils.com/oldsite/Rahner700.htm>. Accessed on February 15, 2012.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁶⁸ Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 322.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

“Christ, the absolute Word of God, has come in the flesh and reconciled, that means united, the world to God through his death and resurrection, not only theoretically but in reality. Ever since, Christ and his permanent historical presence in the world, which we call Church, are religion, which binds man to God.”⁷²

Mentioning about the *absolute religion*, Karl Rahner just wants to explain the historicity and the legitimacy of religion, for this he continues:

“Christianity has a historical beginning in Christ; but this only means that this absolute religion, too, must come to men historically, confronting and claiming them as their legitimate religion.”⁷³

Man, by his nature, is *interpersonal relationships* which are not simply “a matter of feelings or of personal and spiritual relationship”⁷⁴ alone, but these relationships are “concretized in society.”⁷⁵ From this, Karl Rahner proposes: “If salvation history as the history of God’s self- transcendental self-communication to man is a history which can be experienced in time and space, then” he concludes, “it follows from this perspective too that in the Christian understanding religion is necessarily ecclesial religion.”⁷⁶

Today we do not look at the world as something divided in pieces and disconnectedness, but unique as wholeness; there is only a single history of the world. The social network makes us closer to each other. We find ourselves become one in the global village. Because of this, we can only discover our personhood and our uniqueness “within our social nature and in the function of this social nature.”⁷⁷ From this point of view, Karl Rahner leads us to a new way of understanding the term *love of our neighbor*. According to him,

⁷² Idem, *Grace in Freedom*, (Herder and Herder: New York, 1968), p. 83.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁷⁶ Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 323.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

“Love of our neighbor cannot merely mean private relationship to another individual, but also means something social and political, and implies responsibility for social and political structures.”⁷⁸

What Karl Rahner means is that we should not think that “religion has nothing essential to do with the society and with the Church.” Since *man is a social being* who can only exist “within such intercommunication with others throughout all of the dimensions of human existence.”⁷⁹ Once again, Rahner repeats: “We acquire a new understanding of Christian religion as an ecclesial religion.”⁸⁰ In addition, this ecclesial religion with its special nature acts in a special role in Christianity.

1.2.2 Two Fundamentals of the Ecclesial Nature of Christianity

In the discussion about the fundamentals of ecclesial nature of Christianity, Karl Rahner presents moments when discussing the fundamentals of the ecclesial nature of Christianity, but two will be presented in this paper: Christianity is the necessary Church and the necessary historical and social mediation of salvation.

Why is Christianity the necessary Church? To answer to this question, Karl Rahner affirms: “Christianity must be constituted as Church,” meaning that “this ecclesial community belongs to the religious existence of man.” Here Karl Rahner does not mean the Church as *free religion*, which just carries “any religious attitudes and any religious practices”⁸¹, but it must be “a part of man’s question about salvation, and it is fundamentally co-constitutive of his relationship with God.”⁸² In his comment on Karl Rahner’s book

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 342.

Foundation of Christian Faith, Mark F. Fisher shows how the German theologian understands that Christianity must be constituted as a Church:

“In saying that, he [Rahner] does not mean that the Church must necessarily be constituted in this way or that. He means rather that joining with others belongs to the very “religious existence” of humanity. It is not just a religious organization, but helps to constitute the human being’s relation to God.”⁸³

However, we should not infer that someone who does not belong to such an ecclesial constituted Christianity loses his or her salvation, or that he or she cannot have “the ultimate and decisive relationship to God which is grounded in the grace of Christ.”⁸⁴ As Mark F. Fisher writes: “Church is norm,”⁸⁵ it means that “the full and historical actualized Christianity of God’s self-communication is an ecclesial Christianity.”⁸⁶

The question about the Church, says Karl Rahner, “is the question of faith in proper sense.” Since God’s supernatural self-communication to man is revealed in history and this revelation reaches the climax in Christ’s event which is also the essence of Christianity; the Church now “is a part of Christianity as the very event of salvation.” From this, once again Karl Rahner confirms that Christianity is the necessary Church.

In spite of the possible discussions that the statement “Christianity is the necessary Church” can raise, we would like to restrain our approach to the point of the necessary historical and social mediation of salvation. According to Karl Rahner, “the Church itself belongs to the salvation history of God’s grace, not only as some useful religious

⁸³ Mark F. Fisher, *Karl Rahner Foundation of Christian Faith: A Paraphrase of the Foundations of Christian Faith with Introduction and Indices*, (Crossword Publishing Company: n.p., 2005), p. 343. See <http://www.pastoralcouncils.com/oldsite/Rahner700.htm>. Accessed on February 15, 2012.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁸⁶ Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 342-343.

organization, but rather as the categorical concreteness and the mediation of salvation and grace, and only this makes the Church really Church.”⁸⁷ When Karl Rahner says this, he makes a comparison: If “man is social being in his world view,”⁸⁸ then “man as Christian is also an ecclesial being in his ultimate relationship to God.”⁸⁹ Moreover, man, by its nature as an existence, “actualizes his transcendental in history.”⁹⁰ In other place, when Karl Rahner mentions the relationship between history and transcendence, he writes: “Transcendence itself has a history and that history itself is always the event of this transcendence.”⁹¹ To support for this argument, we can read Mark F. Fisher as below:

“History itself has salvific significance, says Rahner. Salvation does not take place merely in a subjective and transcendental interiority. For that reason, salvation must be mediated in history and society. The church belongs to the salvation history of God’s grace. It is “the categorical concreteness and the mediation of salvation and grace” (345). It expresses the transcendental.”⁹²

As we could have seen, to Karl Rahner Christianity is essentially *Ecclesia*. To emphasize this more, Karl Rahner relates the Church and Christianity as a unity based on reciprocity: “The Church as such belongs to Christianity and Christianity as the event of salvation is ecclesial.”⁹³ Of course, the Church which Karl mentions here is not “merely a practical and humanly unavoidable organization for fulfilling and satisfying religious needs.”⁹⁴ In addition, the Christianity understood by Karl Rahner in this discussion is also the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 345

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.140.

⁹² Mark F. Fisher, *Karl Rahner Foundation of Christian Faith: A Paraphrase of the Foundations of Christian Faith with Introduction and Indices*, (Crossword Publishing Company: n.p., 2005), p. 345. See <http://www.pastoralcouncils.com/oldsite/Rahner700.htm>. Accessed on February 15, 2012.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

one that “really becomes conscious of itself and when it intends to maintain the continuity of a real history of salvation and has to prolong the continuity.”⁹⁵ A Christian, as just mentioned, waits for an authoritative Church and the Church which he needs is also a Church which is more than his social organization and which is the concreteness of God’s demands on him. In other words,

“Christianity is the personal self-communication of God’s mystery; ... it comes to us in such a way that there is real history of God self-communication to us [...] God’s supernatural and transcendental self-communication is necessarily mediated historically.”⁹⁶

To conclude this point, we borrow the idea of John Fuellenbach:

“The Church is inseparable from the person of Jesus and has a mission of salvation for the world. As the sacrament of the Kingdom, she is God’s choice, not ours, and is called to accomplish with the Holy Spirit his plan for creation: the salvation of the whole world. She exists in the world and for the world as Jesus’ chosen agent to carry on his mission to gather all people into the one family of God.”⁹⁷

John Fuellenbach also links the Church with the Kingdom of God and according to him, “the Church’s celebration of the saving event in the Eucharist mediates the Kingdom of God to the whole world.”⁹⁸ We will come back with this point in the second part.

1.3 Jesus Christ, God’s Self-Communication to Mankind and the World in Grace

When Karl Rahner points out the necessary historical and social mediation of salvation as Christian Church, he is also proposing that this Christian Church must be seen as a bridge for God’s self-communication to human beings and the world in grace. Although the

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁹⁶ Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 347.

⁹⁷ John Fuellenbach, *Church Community for the Kingdom*, (Logos Publications: Manila, 2001), p. 317.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

Church can have such a particular and special role between God and the world, she is just a mean to God reveal himself as eternal love through God the Son, Jesus Christ who is “God’s ontological and revelatory self-communication.”⁹⁹ In this part of our dissertation, we are going to focus on two points, God’s self-communication as the grace of God to human beings and Jesus Christ as the absolute savior of the world, in order to realize the Christological background of Karl Rahner’s assumptions regarding grace and the Church.

1.3.1 God’s Self- Communication, grace of God to Mankind and The World

In *The Dictionary of Theology*, Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler write that the self-communication of God is God offering Himself as a gift and giver. This is “the very essence of grace, justification and supernatural order” by which “the creature is healed, made eternally blessed by God’s own very being.” This self-communication is “an absolutely free act which God owes to no finite being, even sinless one” to show that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Therefore, God’s self-communication is truly God’s love to human beings and the world. God self-communication, according to Karl Rahner, as “a dynamic principle” between God and the creature¹⁰⁰:

“Since divine self-communication to the creature, as a dynamic principle, is the specific ground of hope, the realization of God’s love for the world, and the principle of the world’s love for God, it is the origin of the world, the supportive ground of its history and goal of this history as well as the substance of its ultimacy.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 153.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler, *Dictionary of theology*, (Crossroad: New York, 1985), p. 469- 470.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 469-470.

The self-communication is also “the prior condition of possibility for its acceptance.”¹⁰² Although God’s self-communication to man is a free gift of God, it needs man’s free acceptance. God never takes away the freedom of man by forcing man to receive God as gift and giver, but rather he lets man freely accept or reject this God’s self-communication. What we need to pay more attention is that if once man accepts God’s self-communication; it is not by his own effort alone, rather God’s self-communication as grace works ahead of time:

“God’s self-communication is given not only as gift, but also as the necessary condition, which makes possible an acceptance of the gift which can allow the gift really to be God, and can prevent the gift in its acceptance from being changed from God into a infinite and created gift which only represents God, but God himself.”¹⁰³

God’s self-communication is seen as God’s love and grace to man and the world.¹⁰⁴ For this, Karl Rahner is not far from Augustine’s teaching of grace, if we do not want to say that Karl Rahner is continuing Augustinian tradition of grace (*prevenient grace*).¹⁰⁵ God always takes the initiative in communication with humankind. He invites man as person to share his divine life; he also gives his grace in order to help man to say “yes” for his invitation.

The term God’s self-communication is a new invented notion of Karl Rahner when he talks about God. To Karl Rahner, God who is Love and who is also Grace reveals himself to

¹⁰² Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 126.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Roger Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 1979), p. 434.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 445.

¹⁰⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, (Blackwell: Victoria, Australia, n.d.), p. 336-337.

the human being and to the world as God's self-communication. M. Cristina Carnicella also writes: "Revelation is communication between God, who reaches out from his own mystery, and humankind, which is saved and transformed in the dialogue of love."¹⁰⁶ The God of self-communication constantly reveals Himself to human beings and to the world in grace through the length of history. This process begins from the universal revelation to the special revelation.

According to Karl Rahner, "The Old and New Testaments do indeed shows that the whole of history stands under God's salvific will and his covenant will," but the full revelation happens only in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷ Through Christ, "the divinized subjectivity of man is fully constituted".¹⁰⁸ In Jesus Christ, "God who communicates himself"¹⁰⁹ to human beings becomes "irrevocably one, and the history of revelation and salvation of the whole human race reaches its goal."¹¹⁰ Alternatively, "the presence of Jesus Christ is the self-communication of God to human beings."¹¹¹ If we agree with Karl Rahner about that "man is the event of absolute self-communication of God,"¹¹² we also accept that Jesus Christ is God's self-communication to humankind and the world in grace and "its categorical self-interpretation in the corporeal, tangible and social dimension have reached their climax."

¹⁰⁶ M. Cristina Carnicella, "Communication," René Latourelle (ed.), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, (Crossroad Publishing Company: New York, 1994), p. 187.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 158-165.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹¹¹ Franz-Josef Eilers, *Communicating in Community: An Introduction to Social Communication*, (Manila: Logos 2002), p. 2.

¹¹² Idem, *Foundation of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 174.

Moreover, in Jesus Christ, the revelation also reaches its absolute sense.¹¹³ Now we come to the point that Jesus Christ is the absolute savior of the world.

1.3.2 Jesus Christ, the Absolute Savior of the World

The cornerstone of Karl Rahner's theology is Jesus Christ, the absolute savior of the world. His famous proposal of the concept of the *anonymous Christians* is based on the discussion about Jesus Christ and his relationship with the other religions. Karl Rahner proposes the term *anonymous Christians* because he looks at Jesus Christ as unique, universal and *absolute Savior* of human beings and the world. The *anonymous Christian*, says Karl Rahner, is that

“Since the transcendental self-communication of God as an offer to man's freedom is an existential of every person, and since it is a moment in the self-communication of God to the world which reaches its goal and climax in Jesus Christ, we can speak of *anonymous Christian*.”¹¹⁴

The existence of other religions is a reality in the world; if we claim that Jesus Christ is unique, universal and *absolute Savior* for everyone in all times and at everywhere, then the having existence of *anonymous Christian* is obvious. How is Christ able to be present in other religions? Through his Spirit, answers Karl Rahner, “the event of Christ is the final cause of the communication of the Spirit to the World.”¹¹⁵ For the Spirit of Jesus Christ is “the Logos of God who became man,”¹¹⁶ being present everywhere in the world; and in his Spirit, Jesus Christ also is “present and operative in all faith.”¹¹⁷ According to Karl Rahner, “only someone who explicitly professes in faith and in baptism that Jesus is Christ is a Christian in the

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

historical and reflexive dimension of God's transcendental self-communication."¹¹⁸ In other words, those who believe that Jesus is Christ and receive baptism are Christian by name.

To defend the absolute Savior's point of view, Karl Rahner confidently discusses it in an evolutionary view of the world. Having done so, Karl Rahner wants to prove that the doctrine of the Incarnation, which is still understandable and acceptable for the modern world and it is not something which is as foreign body in comparing with "mentality and experience of people today."¹¹⁹ Rahner's purpose is "Christianity and the modern spirit."¹²⁰ We should not misunderstand that Karl "attempts to turn faith into philosophy" or Karl Rahner is doing a "theological rationalism"¹²¹. For this, Rahner makes clear: "we are not trying to deduce the Christian doctrine of Incarnation from an evolutionary view of the world"¹²² Rather, Karl Rahner wants to prove that there is "no contradiction between the *absolute Savior* point of view with scientific and experimental point of view."¹²³

Through the evolutionary and transcendental view, Rahner concludes that in Jesus Christ, the matter and spirit, God and creation, divine and human are fully united. He is the beginning and the end of creation. In the view of ascending theology, Karl Rahner leads us to the incarnation of God and the incarnation of eternal Logos in Jesus who fills up the gap between God and human beings and who is truly God and truly man as Council Chalcedon (451 CE) has claimed. This is what we call the hypostatic union in which "the God-Man is

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 178-179.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 178-179.

the initial beginning and the definitive triumph of the movement of the world's transcendence into absolute closeness to the mystery of God.”¹²⁴

It also means that the history of salvation is a process that begins from God who self-communicates to humankind and the world. This process moves towards its goal, which is Jesus Christ and for everyone, who responds to the invitation of this divine self-communication: “In Jesus Christ, God has given and communicated himself wholly;”¹²⁵ and in Jesus Christ, the revelation which “feeds our faith, our hope and our love” is visibly historically and socially made.”¹²⁶ Saint Paul also says: “The grace of God now has been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 1:10) or “In Jesus Christ, the Agape of God, i.e., ‘the goodness and loving kindness’...of God our Savior appeared to us.” (Ti 3:4).¹²⁷ According to René Latourelle, Thomas Aquinas sees the salvation history is a movement, which slowly reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ:

“There is the movement that brings the human race closer and closer to the Incarnation. The nearer Christ's coming, the nearer the fullness of revelation...the ultimate perfection of grace became a reality in Christ; therefore the time of Christ is called the time of fullness.” (ST 2-2, q.1, a.7, ad 4).”¹²⁸

So once again, Karl Rahner concludes:

“God's self-communication reaches its unsurpassable high point through the hypostatic union and in the incarnation of God in the created, spiritual reality of Jesus for his own sake, and hence for the sake of all of us. But this takes place in the incarnation of the Logos because here what is expressed and communicated, namely

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹²⁵ René Latourelle, “Revelation,” René Latourelle (ed.), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, (Crossroad Publishing Company: New York, 1994), p. 940.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 940.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 932.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1016.

God himself.¹²⁹ The natural world was created as at once the condition and the recipient of God's self-communication in the Incarnation of the Logos. Even the grace of original justice was already the grace of Jesus Christ. Sin, as opposition to God in Christ, is permitted by God because in Jesus Christ it is comprehended within God's unconditional will to this self-communication, which by very fact becomes a redemptive self-communication. The grace which justifies and divinizes us, as in fact it is granted to us, is essentially so much grace of the Incarnate and crucified that grace and Incarnation are two inseparable elements of the one mystery of God's self-communication to his creatures."¹³⁰

Jesus Christ is truly *God's self-communication* to humankind and the world in grace.

He is the absolute Savior of all human beings and the world as Karl Rahner and the Church also claim: "Jesus Christ is supreme and qualitatively unique realization of God self-communication to the world and his will to save all men."¹³¹ He forms a Church, which is a social mediation of salvation, and more than that, she also is the prime example of social grace.

1.4 The Church as Prime Example of Social Dimension of Grace

The Church is seen as the prime example of social grace. She is "an institution that serves as the sacrament of God's grace..."¹³² For "any group, institution, organization or society"¹³³ which acts "as social dimension of grace,"¹³⁴ if "it is concerned with human life and enhances the common good."¹³⁵ In this part, we focus on two points: first, the Church as the fundamental sacrament and second, the Church is concerned with human life and

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹³⁰ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler, *Dictionary of theology*, (Crossroad: New York, 1985), p. 70.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹³² Roger Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 1979), p. 454.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

enhances the common good. We mean that the Church is a place for love of God and of our neighbors as social grace.

1.4.1 The Church, the Sacrament of the World's Salvation

According to Karl Rahner, “the necessity of the Church for human salvation is to be understood in the context of this sacramental character.”¹³⁶ Why is the sacramental character needed for human salvation? To answer for this question, Karl Rahner says that “the fundamental essence of the sacrament is to be found in the words”¹³⁷ which the Church proclaims in “the name and with the mandate of God and Jesus Christ”¹³⁸ that bring “God’s grace”; and “the word of God can only exist as the effect of his grace.”¹³⁹ Hence the word of Gospel which is also the word of salvation proclaimed by the Church in faith is “always sustained by a grace that is in fact effective” because this word comes from God. From this, Karl Rahner continues: “The Church is the bearer of that word of God’s promise of himself to the world that creates the salvation that is eschatologically victorious. Hence the Church is primal or fundamental sacrament.”¹⁴⁰ This idea was particularly developed on his reflection about the relationship between the Church and the sacraments:

“Through its belief in God’s grace that is eschatologically victorious in Jesus Christ, a belief that it hears and proclaims in faith, the Church is the sacrament of the world’s salvation, since she proclaims and makes present as eschatologically victorious in the world that grace that will never again disappear from this world and that invincibly is moving this world towards the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.”¹⁴¹ By the very fact of being in that way the enduring presence of Christ in the world, the Church is truly

¹³⁶ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler, *Dictionary of theology*, (Crossroad: New York, 1985), p. 74.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

¹⁴¹ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler, *Dictionary of theology*, (Crossroad: New York, 1985), p. 453.

fundamental sacrament in the strict sense. From Christ, the Church has an intrinsically sacramental structure.”¹⁴²

The Church is the sacrament of the world’s salvation or, in other words, the Church has an intrinsically sacramental structure, which comes from its relationship with Christ. Without Christ, the Church is just like other secular organizations. Christ is the real meaning of Church’s symbol. Karl Rahner believes that “the acts of Jesus which founded the Church”¹⁴³ This means: first, “Jesus [Christ] gathered disciples around himself in order to assemble the people of God around him,”¹⁴⁴ second, “the community of disciples is to continue to stay together,”¹⁴⁵ and third, “the ecclesiological mandate in the sayings of the risen Jesus [Christ]... definitively bestow the powers of Jesus upon the disciples for the continuation of his work in the world.”¹⁴⁶ For this, Karl Rahner also expresses:

“The abiding presence of Christ in the Church in the sign that God in his merciful love identifies himself in Christ with the world. And because the Church is the sign of grace of God definitively triumphant in the world in Christ, this sign can never – as a real possibility – become a meaningless symbol.”¹⁴⁷

Even clearer, writes Bernard Cooke: “The Church is the sacrament of the risen Christ.”¹⁴⁸ We saw already how Karl Rahner presents the Church as chosen by God in Christ as the historical and social mediation of salvation. This idea is also implicit when Karl Rahner speaks of the Church as sacrament:

¹⁴² Idem, *The Church and The Sacraments*, (Burns and Oats: London, 1978), p. 18.

¹⁴³ Idem, *Foundation of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 332.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹⁴⁷ Idem, *The Church and The Sacraments*, (Burns and Oats: London, 1978), p. 18.

¹⁴⁸ Bernard J. Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality*, (Twenty-Third Publications: New London, 1994), p. 71.

“As ongoing presence of Jesus Christ in time and space, as the fruit of salvation by which God offers his salvation to individuals in a tangible way and in the historical and social dimension, the Church is the basic sacrament.”¹⁴⁹

Karl Rahner also reminds us that “the Church is a sign of salvation, and is not simply salvation itself”¹⁵⁰, but she is “the sign and historical manifestation of the victorious success of God’s self-communication.”¹⁵¹ The Church is a sacrament, she is the sign, but this means the sign of grace or the sign of efficacious grace. For this, Karl Rahner affirms: “the Church is a sign, but it is the sign of an efficacious and successful grace for the world,”¹⁵² and for the Church is a gracious sign, she also becomes “the basic sacrament in this radical sense.”¹⁵³

The Church is as basic sacrament, says Rahner, she is also the *Christian sacrament*: “God’s offer of himself becomes manifest in the concrete in the life of an individual through the Church which is *basic sacrament* of salvation, we call this a Christian sacrament.”¹⁵⁴ Why does Rahner look at the Church as the sacrament of the world’s salvation, primal and fundamental sacrament, basic sacrament and Christian sacrament? Here is the key to the answer of Karl Rahner the question:

“Viewed in relation to Christ, the Church is abiding promulgation of his grace-giving presence in the world. Viewed in the relation to the sacraments, the Church is the primal and fundamental sacrament.”¹⁵⁵

For viewing the Church in relation to the sacraments, Karl Rahner uses differently sacramental terms from which we are accustomed to the Church. Karl Rahner sees the

¹⁴⁹ Idem, *Foundation of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 412.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹⁵⁵ Idem, *The Church and The Sacraments*, (Burns and Oats: London, 1978), p. 19.

Church as the sacrament. This helps us easily to understand the Church as prime example of social grace. We will continue to find the answer for this in the next point.

1.4.2 The Church as the Place for Love of God and of Neighbor

The reflection about the Church as sacrament leads us to the question about the Church as the prime example of social grace. The key word to this answer might be present in the proposal of one of Karl Rahner's contemporaries, Bernhard Haring, who has the very close with Karl Rahner's idea on the social dimension of grace when Bernhard Haring proposes that the Church is "the realm of love for one's neighbor."¹⁵⁶ For this, the Church becomes a sacrament of love.¹⁵⁷ As Jesus Christ makes visible the love of God the Father to humankind and the world, now to her turn, the Church who is formed and trusted by Christ also makes the love of Jesus Christ, which is also the love of the God Father, visible, public and social to everyone through her practice of the love for our neighbor. Karl Rahner touches on the social dimension of grace when he asserts that "love of neighbor...is realized in deed and action; it has a sociological dimension,"¹⁵⁸ but where do we find this social dimension of grace? It "must be realized in justice and the maintenance of a sphere of freedom for the others...."¹⁵⁹

We know that Rahner's understanding of grace in relationship to Christianity includes love of God and of our neighbors. He writes that "an ultimate transcendental of the person

¹⁵⁶ Bernard Haring, *A Sacramental Spirituality*, (Sheed and Ward: New York, 1965), p. 278.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

¹⁵⁸ Marilyn Sunderman, "Grace and Lived Christianity in the Theology of Karl Rahner and Leonardo Boff," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, V. 1/8 (2011), p. 28. [www.ijhssnet.com/journals/vol. 1 no. 8; july 2011/34.pdf](http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/vol.1_no.8_july_2011/34.pdf). Accessed on March 23, 2012.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

radicalized by grace into the mystery of God and self-renunciation in love of neighbor,”¹⁶⁰ and this love of neighbors “represents the two aspects of the one Christian life”¹⁶¹: First, the love of our neighbors is an act in which one experiences God directly and transcendently,¹⁶² second, the love of neighbors is also a “response to God’s love [and] is sustained by God’s love itself.”¹⁶³ The act of the love of our neighbor “which contains the whole mystery of human being is an experience of the grace of salvation.”¹⁶⁴

The love of our neighbor, says Karl Rahner, “cannot merely mean private relationship to another individual,”¹⁶⁵ but once we talk about the love of neighbor, it is also means “something social and political, and implies responsibility for social and political structures.”¹⁶⁶ Through the love of our neighbor, the Church in her pastoral love makes public and social of the love of Jesus Christ. In this sense, the Church is truly “the official presence of the grace of Christ in public history of the one human race.”¹⁶⁷

How does Karl Rahner react to the statement: “all the laws of the Church are expressions of her pastoral love?”¹⁶⁸ Although Karl Rahner does not say directly Christian law is love, he seemingly means the same thing: “It is really quite impossible to say exactly what is really demanded by the Christian law. It can indeed be said that what is demanded is

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.28.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁶⁵ *Idem, Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 323.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18-19.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18-19.

love.”¹⁶⁹ In addition, “man has an obligation to love God and therein consists the real fulfillment of the whole divine law and of all the commandments,”¹⁷⁰ for through love “all the commandments find their ultimate meaning in love alone.”¹⁷¹ Or in other words: “The grace of love is not a power given to the fulfillment of a law which precedes this fulfillment,”¹⁷² says Karl Rahner, but rather, “the law is given because love is already there as a possibility to be liberated and to be aroused in order to fulfill itself, and because the will of God is already present in the world.”¹⁷³

Karl Rahner truly leads his readers to understand that the law of the Church is rooted in the Holy Scripture and Tradition. We can call this law as the office teaching of the Church or in other words, the doctrine of the Church.¹⁷⁴ Truly all the laws of the Church, which shows off the visible and social sign of the sacramental love of the Church orientate to the most important commandment: love of God and love of our neighbor:

Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? ³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”^[a] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”^[b] ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Mt 22:36-40).

Karl Rahner also looks at the Church as the primordial sacrament of the Kingdom of God. For the love of God and of our neighbor visibly and socially are exercised inside the Church. Once Karl Rahner mentions the Kingdom of God, we immediately think of “the

¹⁶⁹ Idem, *Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, V (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1966), p. 453-457.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 453-457.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 453-457.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 453-457.

¹⁷³ Idem, *Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, V (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1966), p. 457.

¹⁷⁴ Idem, *Foundation of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 375-397.

promises of justice, freedom, love and peace.”¹⁷⁵ These are the values of a society of “those who believe in the Kingdom of God to be terminate the history of the world.”¹⁷⁶ At this point, we find Karl Rahner has the same idea with The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. This Pontifical Council teaches that “the Church bears witness to man, in the name of Christ...She teaches him the demands of justice and peace in conformity with divine wisdom.” The Pontifical Council also points out: “The effectiveness of truth and grace that comes out from the Spirit of God, who...designs of love, justice, freedom and peace.”¹⁷⁷ The Church have duty to promote “a society befitting mankind, because it befits Christ and it means building a city of man that is more human because it is in greater conformity with the Kingdom of God.”¹⁷⁸ Doing like this, the Church promotes for the common good and brotherhood in human life which are the values of God’s Kingdom; because of that “which is concerned as social grace”¹⁷⁹, it is also “concerned with human life and enhances the common good.”¹⁸⁰ Of course, a perfect society is not possible in this world, but the Church can offer “the fulfillment of humanity’s social destiny.”¹⁸¹

The Church is “as an icon of Trinity brings forth that unity with Triune God” and with each other for which the Kingdom of God is the perfect expression. Only the Kingdom in its ultimate fullness will be the final reconciliation of two dimensions of human

¹⁷⁵ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Dictionary of theology*, (Crossroad: New York, 1985), p. 264

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹⁷⁸ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Pauline Publications: Mumbai, 2005), No. 63.

¹⁷⁹ Roger Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 1979), p. 454.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

¹⁸¹ John Fuellenbach, *Church Community for the Kingdom*, (Logos Publications: Manila, 2001), p. 127.

personality:¹⁸² The individual as “every human being is unique and unrepeatable”¹⁸³ and the social as “communitarian and belong to species.”¹⁸⁴ Only the coming Kingdom where the Triune God whose very essence is *One in Three*¹⁸⁵ who is the answer for the unity of human personality and also for a clearer understanding of the social dimension of grace. Because grace, says Karl, refers to God, but God is God’s self-communication, or in other words, the God is understood here as “God at work outside of God’s self”¹⁸⁶ to human beings: Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit who are God’s true grace and who really make God’s self-communication (grace) become social and public in the Church.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125-127.

¹⁸⁶ Roger Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 1979), p. 439.

2 The Social Dimension of Grace

In this second part, our discussion will follow the order: first, God's self-communication or "social Trinity," second, the social dimension of grace and the purpose of human freedom and third, the social dimension of grace in the context of the collective eschatology. We can talk about social dimension of grace in two ways: First, since human existence is social, there also must be the relationship of grace to human existence and for this, we must ask the question: "What is the impact of grace on society?" Second, we can see in our society today that "great sin that bears down on individuals and corporately on human existence as a whole is social,"¹⁸⁷ so there must be social dimension of grace. It means that if we can talk about the social dimension of sin, then we also can talk about the social dimension of grace.

Actually, Karl Rahner does not build up a social grace as theory and we do not look for this kind of theory. As we have mentioned in the introduction, there is only one grace, but with different dimensions. What we should look for in Rahner's writings is the social dimension of grace.

2.1 God's Self-Communication or "Social Trinity"

We have already given the meaning of the notion "God's self-communication", so we will not repeat again here. What we want to remember here is that God's self-communication is God working outside himself as grace. God's self-communication has a social meaning.

¹⁸⁷ Roger Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 1979), p. 453.

Since God is one in three persons, God himself is a “community”. The human person is created in God’s image and human person is a social being. This social character also is inherited from God. In other words, if human person carries social character (Karl Rahner says that he truly is a social builder) and he is God’s image, so we can call God, who creates man as social being, a “social Trinity.” Alternatively, to help this finite social being (man) fulfill his social life; God must give him a social dimension of grace and this grace, says Karl Rahner, is God himself as God’s self-communication. According to the German theologian, we can talk about this by our own experience of God, for “our God-experience is our self-experience.”¹⁸⁸ From the experience of Trinity in economy of salvation, Rahner suggests a new way to approach the doctrine of Trinity.

2.1.1 Social Dimension of Grace in God’s Self-Communication

According to Rahner, the economic Trinity is also the immanent Trinity. This means, “The Trinity in the history of salvation and revelation is the “*immanent*” Trinity.”¹⁸⁹ Because “God’s self-communication to his creation through grace and Incarnation God”¹⁹⁰ is the same God who “gives himself... as he is in himself.”¹⁹¹ If God in himself and God in the history of salvation is the same God who is Love; if God is God’s self-communication; if God offers himself (fully God) as a gift to human beings, we affirm that Grace is God himself, God freely gives himself to his creatures. The social meaning of grace implies itself inside the life of immanent Trinity. One of the persons offers totally himself to the others in love. The life

¹⁸⁸ Gatis Lidums, *The Doctrine of Imago Dei and Its Relation to Self-Transcendence in the Context of Practical Theology*, (University of Helsinki: Helsinki, 2004), p. 66, see <http://ethesis.helsinki.fi/julkaisut/teo/kayta/vk/lidums/thedoctr.pdf>. Accessed on March 23, 20012.

¹⁸⁹ Idem, *Foundation of Christian Faith: An introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 136.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

of immanent Trinity is not a lonely life; rather there is a communication of the love of the person Father, the love of the person Son and the love of the person Holy Spirit. “God’s threefold” remains mysteriously in the life of one God (immanent Trinity).

Actually, once we mention about love, it implies a sociality. For love is toward someone else and from this, the community is established. God is Love; it means that there must be a communication, relationship or sociality in God himself.

Therefore, God truly socializes himself in economic Trinity. It means that he (love) gives himself as a gift (grace) to human beings. The economic Trinity is God working out of himself for the salvation of human beings, although he remains unchanged as what he is in the immanent Trinity. He opens himself as love and grace to the creatures in himself as God’s self-communication, but still remains the Mystical God, as Rahner writes:

“Divine self-communication means, then, that God can communicate himself in his own reality to what is not divine without ceasing to be infinite reality and absolute mystery, and without man ceasing to be a finite existent different from God. This self-communication does not cancel out or deny what was said earlier about the presence of God as absolute mystery which is essentially incomprehensible.”¹⁹²

The social dimension of grace becomes clearly in God’s self-communication. The term *communication* or *self-communication* tells us something of social dimension when God self-communicates to human beings. Once mentioning about the communication, we think of persons, inter-persons and community, (which we are basic elements needed for a society.) Charles R. Meyer also says that “the true community is formed by communication.”¹⁹³ Here we want to talk about the community formed between God and human beings. (This community is different from the community of God himself as immanent Trinity). There are

¹⁹² Idem, *The Foundation of The Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 119.

¹⁹³ Charles R. Meyer, *A Contemporary Theology of Grace*, (The Society of Saint Paul: New York, 1971), P. 67.

two ways, in which God communicates with human beings. First is communication between the Trinitarian God and an individual human person. Second is communication between Trinitarian God and a group of human beings as collective community. However, God's grace is not different from God himself. God truly gives himself to human beings. God, who makes himself grace for an individual, collective or even universal level, is the same God and the same grace for all.

God's self-communication is God himself who is love and grace. Love, grace and communication tell us about the relationships of Father, Son and Holy Spirit of one God, and of the one God with human persons. However, here we want to talk about the community of three persons in one God as we mentioned above. Here is another way of understanding the social dimension of grace in God himself. We temporarily call "community" of God Trinity as the holy community, the Trinitarian community, the supernatural community or even the social Trinity. This divine community is the community of love and of grace. The divine community itself is bearing a social gracious dimension. What we suggest is the social dimension of grace, which is present in God himself, both the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. Because, says Rahner, "the Trinity in the history and economy of salvation is the immanent Trinity."¹⁹⁴

Once again, since we can talk about God as the community of love, the community of grace or the social Trinity, we also can obviously talk about the social dimension of love, social dimension of grace in the divine community.

This social dimension of grace in God's self-communication remains unchanged, even when we talk about God the Father, God the Son-Logos and God the Holy Spirit as

¹⁹⁴ Idem, *Foundation of Christian Faith: An introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 136.

three persons separately in one God. “These three modes of presence for us are real different and strictly distinguished,”¹⁹⁵ says Rahner, but “these three modes of presence of one and the same God”¹⁹⁶ remain “the real self-communication of God as the one and only and the same God.”¹⁹⁷ In other words, “the Father gives himself to us in absolute self-communication through the Son in the Holy Spirit”¹⁹⁸ is “to be understood and made in the strict sense as assertion about God *as he is in himself*.”¹⁹⁹ God’s self-communication to human beings in grace truly socializes in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

2.1.2 The Socialization of God’s Grace through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit

We know that God reveals himself in two ways: universal and particular (in space and time). In the first part, we have already discussed Jesus Christ is truly God’s self-communication to humankind and the world in grace. Here we will place emphasis more on social dimension of grace, which Karl Rahner confirms:

“In Jesus, God’s self-communication to man in grace and at the same time its categorical self-interpretation in the corporeal, tangible and social dimension have reached their climax, have become revelation in an absolute sense.”²⁰⁰

For this, Jesus Christ himself is God’s self-communication of grace, as Jesus himself also proclaims: “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” (Jn 14:9). When having taught that in Jesus Christ “the decisive event of the history of God with mankind is fulfilled,”²⁰¹ the

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.136.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.136.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 137.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.136.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

²⁰¹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Pauline Publications: Mumbai, 2005), No. 28.

Church also reaffirms that “the love that inspires Jesus’ ministry among men is the love that he has experienced in his intimate union with the Father.”²⁰²

Jesus Christ is God’s project “in which God invested his freedom and love.”²⁰³ He is “the fullest sense of the image of God” and “an act of God’s love.”²⁰⁴ He becomes the highest point of God’s self-communication to human beings. In other words, God’s self-communication as grace in Jesus Christ is publicly revealed in space and time. God’s self-communication in Christ historically became a member, a worker of a family at Nazareth, a citizen of Palestinian country. Jesus Christ, God’s self-communication to human beings was born in the certain environment of political, economic, cultural, racial, religious... social conditions: in Jewish society.

From the moment of incarnation of Jesus Christ, there is a new value to be clearly put on family, citizen, state, race, politic, culture and religion, etc., that is value of salvation or value of love and grace, which God’s self-communication through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit gives to human persons and the world. Through Jesus Christ, the grace of God not only privately comes to human persons, but also publicly and visibly appears to them. God’s grace in Jesus Christ incarnated in flesh, words and actions of human beings. Karl Rahner expresses:

“Before Christ, the dialogue between God and humankind in the history of eternal welfare and loss was an open one... Everything was still unsettled... But now in the Word of God, God’s last word is uttered into the visible public history of humankind, a word of grace, reconciliation and eternal life: Jesus Christ. The grace of God no longer comes (when it does comes) steeply down from on high, from God absolutely transcending the world, and in a manner that it is without history, purely episodic, it is

²⁰² *Ibid.*, No. 28.

²⁰³ Charles R. Meyer, *A Contemporary Theology of Grace*, (The Society of Saint Paul: New York, 1971), p. 33.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

permanently in the world in tangible historical form, established in the flesh of Christ as part of the World, of humanity and of its very history.”²⁰⁵

This is the first time in human history, people could witness the grace of God with their own eyes and touch the grace of God with their own hands. Jesus Christ, the grace of God, the salvation of human beings lived among them. This is the first time, Jesus Christ, God’s love and grace became a social topic, which can be discussed by people on the street and other public places. Because he preached in synagogues, healed the sick in public, fed the crowd at open area, and he discussed the Scripture with scribes in the temple... His speeches, works and miracles are all God’s grace for salvation of man. This grace did not smoothly come to them, but also challenged them, changed their mind and their way of life. Jesus Christ’s pastoral work touched all dimensions of people’s life.

“Rahner describes the Incarnation as proto-grace, i.e., the archetype of all grace. By means of the Incarnation, God graciously inserted self into human history. In and through Jesus, human nature achieved its apogee in terms of engracement, since, in Jesus’ very person, grace became completely actualized.”²⁰⁶

The society of human beings with all its dimensions now is “nursed” by the words, actions of love and grace from God-man, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ teaches people about a new structure of their society, which is built on love, grace and forgiveness, in communication to God’s self-communication: Kingdom of God. In Jesus Christ-grace of God, people rediscover new meanings in all of the social issues such as the suffering, the poor, the slaves, the sinners, the sick, and even the prostitutes, the lepers...(including the

²⁰⁵ John Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for The Kingdom*, (Logos Publications: Manila, 2001), p. 27.

²⁰⁶ Marilyn Sunderman, “Grace and Lived Christianity in the Theology of Karl Rahner and Leonardo Boff,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, V, 1/ 8 (2011), p. 280, www.ijhssnet.com. Accessed on March 23, 2012.

leadership, politics, religion). All of these issues are discussed in the light of God's self-communication, of children of God, of "brotherhood in Jesus Christ."²⁰⁷

By forming the Church as social mediation of God's grace, Jesus Christ, God's self-communication (grace) continues to "socialize" his life. He gave the commission to his disciples that they should go out and "make disciples of all nations and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." (Mt 28: 19) Through baptism, God's self-communication through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit invites all humans to join the Trinitarian life. Each member of human community who joins the divine life becomes the social means of grace in communication to other human persons. He or she never lives alone, but joining with others to form community as Rahner says, "human existence, wherever we may meet it, is always found to be existence in the world, is always necessarily being with others, community."²⁰⁸

By the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, the grace of God is not only enclosed in the Church, but also can reach non-Christian believers. As we have mentioned above, Karl Rahner calls the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit of Christ:

"This is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, so that as the Spirit of the eternal Logos he can and must be called, at least in this sense, the Spirit of Christ, the Divine Word who become man."²⁰⁹

Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, God's self-communication, reaches all over the world, "the language of the Spirit will be accessible to all peoples and cultures."²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Mary Elsbernd, "Toward a Theology of Spirit That builds Up the Just Community," Bradford E. Hinze (ed.), *The Spirit in The Church and The World*, 49, (Orbis Books: New York, 2004), p. 153.

²⁰⁸ Idem, *Theological Investigations: The Theology of Spiritual Life*, III (Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 1974), p. 263.

²⁰⁹ Idem, *The Foundation of The Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 316.

The Holy Spirit of Christ forms communities of *anonymous Christians*, which may not explicitly reveal themselves to us as communities of the Holy Spirit of Christ, but they implicitly belong to Christ's Mystical Body. The Church is a unique body, but in her social dimension, there are different types of community. Rahner divides these communities into three main types.

2.1.3 Social Dimension of Grace in Forming Three Types of Community

In the topic of “the consecration of the layman to the care of souls”²¹¹, Karl Rahner divides human existence into three types of community: community of work, community of spirit and community of love. According to Rahner, “every Christian is consecrated to the care of souls, by the love which embraces both God and man.”²¹² The term consecration itself, says Rahner, has two aspects: “The receiving of a power and the receiving of a commission.”²¹³ But first of all, the consecration is not born by man's nature, rather it is given by Jesus Christ, God's self-communication in grace through the Church, which is the social mediation of grace.

We can say that “only he who loves God can love his brother, can be a pastor.”²¹⁴ Why that? Karl Rahner answers: “A true care of ‘souls’ is possible only through God.”²¹⁵ Pastor means here not only an officially ordained pastor, but it is as a task conceived by the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. The love of our brother is only seen as a true care of

²¹⁰ Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Parede, *Theology of Religious Life: Covenant and Mission*, (Claretian Publications: Quezon City, 2006), p. 18.

²¹¹ Idem, *Theological Investigations: The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, III (Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 1974), p. 263.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 276.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

²¹⁴ Idem, *The Theological Investigations: The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, III (Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 1974), p. 271.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

souls, when this love is “possible through God.” However, where is the consecration of the care of souls produced? Karl Rahner answers:

“Fundamentally it is Baptism which consecrates us into it. Baptism is pouring out of love for God and therefore consecration, power, and commission to pastoral care. And every sacramental increase of grace in Penance and Eucharist is renewed commission to go forth and search out the innermost being of our brothers and lead them to God. Everyone who is baptized is consecrated a pastor.”²¹⁶

Now we see how the three kinds of communities mentioned above fulfill their pastoral activity:

The community of labour is a community in which “men [are] brought together by their common external activity”²¹⁷ This community, says Karl Rahner, “can become a pastoral activity.”²¹⁸ This community forms from the reality of life. People come together from “mutual help and service in the material concerns of life.”²¹⁹ They join, working together for their own daily need, but also for the need of others. Their efforts and sacrifices in their works can bring happiness and success for their family and society. In other words, they are working for “the necessities of the earth.”²²⁰ Thinking in this way, Karl Rahner suggests that the labours should lift up and consecrate their daily work as work of “pastoral love.”²²¹ For this, the whole of daily life can become an apostolate.²²² When the whole of

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 272.

daily life is an apostolate, all of everyday activities can become “salvation-work”. It means our daily works can become “the care of souls.”²²³

How do we as laborers lift up and consecrate the daily activities of laborers as pastoral work, we mean the work of charity? We should be aware of our Christian role, which is continuing Jesus Christ’s pastoral ministry. What Jesus Christ did is for the salvation of human beings. If we Christians do our work in the spirit of charity, we are continuing the pastoral care of Jesus Christ. It does not matter how important the work you do, even a mother, says Karl Rahner, who washes her child’s nappies in “because the way she is serving her child, a child with an eternal destiny, then this is pastoral love and a testimony to the pastoral love of Christ...”²²⁴

The community of spirit is a community (“community of minds”²²⁵) which “may consist in sharing in the creation of spiritual works of universal validity: science, art, law.”²²⁶ These spiritual products are communicated by means of speech. Speech here, says Karl Rahner, is not necessary with sound. The community of spirit “consists in each introducing the other into the realm of what is eternally true and good.”²²⁷ From this, the community of spirit helps “to make objective spiritual forms achieve a reality in men which they can recognize and love.”²²⁸ Karl Rahner points out that the means through which the community of spirit communicates with others is through speech, discourse and word.

²²³ *Ibid.* p. 272.

²²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 273.

²²⁵ Karl Rahner, *The Investigation of Theology: Man in the Church*, II (Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 1963), p. 341.

²²⁶ Karl Rahner, *The Investigation of Theology: The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, III (Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 1974), p. 263.

²²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 273.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

Here we see how Karl Rahner leads this community of spirit into Christian field, and makes it become a pastoral community; how speech, discourse and word of a Christian become powerful as coming from the mouth of “the ambassador of God.”²²⁹ According to Rahner, the community of spirit only “attains its highest form when it becomes a community with God.”²³⁰ For this, says Karl Rahner:

“Every Christian – the mother who takes a child on her knee and teaches him his first prayers, the teacher who gives ‘Religious Instruction’, whoever proclaims his faith by a Sign of the cross – is the ambassador of God, the hearer of the delightful and awesome secret of him who dwells in inaccessible light, whom none has ever seen.”²³¹

If the speech, discourse and word come from the mouth of a Christian mother when she teaches her child or a Christian teacher when he or she gives religious instruction becomes powerful as coming from the mouth of the ambassador of God, it is because God “transforms” their speech, discourse and word “proceeding from their mouth into his own Word.”²³² A Christian has this capacity and commission from the sacrament of Confirmation.

In the same way:

“Every occasion when a truth is passed on, every act of teaching, of exhortation and education, every conversation about what is true and good and beautiful, can be pastoral, can be a part of that proclamation of the faith to which the confirmed Christian is committed. And so all community of spirit can be inserted into the most intimate community of pastoral love and receive thereby its greatest profundity and most sacred nobility.”²³³

²²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 274.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 274.

²³³ *Ibid.* p. 275.

We can see that we Christians “can be elevated and divinized by the Spirit of light and love of Confirmation.”²³⁴ The capacity and commission of the sacrament of confirmation, one again, lifts up and consecrates our spiritual products to the pastoral level, the proclamation of the faith and, more than that, a care of souls.

The third community is community of love. It is community of love between human beings. This community, says Karl Rahner, is the most diverse forms, but the clearest expression of this kind of community is in marriage. Marriage, says Karl Rahner, is representative for every community of love. In the marriage community, “two people give themselves to each other and their child for ever in the highest community of which the power of human loving is capable, love of person himself.”²³⁵ In the sacrament of marriage, “this love becomes capable of the supreme act of love in the love of God.”²³⁶ God’s grace acts in a special way in the marriage couple. “By the grace of God, the way which leads to the beloved becomes a way leading to God, closeness to a human being brings about a growing closeness to God.”²³⁷ The relationship between the love of God and the love of our neighbors is more understandable in the sacrament of marriage and the commission of the care of souls received in Baptism and Confirmation becomes clearer. Karl Rahner writes that “the Sacrament of Matrimony constitutes a new consecration to the care of souls because it is an increase of supernatural love for God and for men.”²³⁸

Christian marriage is a real representation of the unifying love of God in Christ for humankind. For the image of the Church “becomes present in marriage: marriage is really

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 276.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

the smallest community of the redeemed and the sanctified.”²³⁹ The reason, why the sacramental marriage is seen as “a smallest individual church”, is because, says Karl Rahner, “its unity can be built on the same basis on which the unity of the church is founded.”²⁴⁰

“Hence wherever there is a unity in love between two persons, a love which is not merely a pragmatic unity for earthly goals, but rather which unites the persons themselves in their final and definitive validity, this is the effect and the manifestation of the grace which forms the most real unity among persons. But conversely, too, this very same grace as a unifying force between God and man becomes manifest in the unity between Christ and the Church.”²⁴¹

So the community of labours, community of spirit and community of love are three ways in which the love and grace of God comes into practice in human society. In other words, God’s self-communication in grace is one with human beings in their daily activity. Jesus Christ, God’s self-communication to the world and human beings really incarnated not only for the salvation of human beings in general, but through his Spirit, Jesus Christ can socialize himself as grace in all dimensions of human society in order to help men building up his a gracious society and world. However, although grace of God is free gift, he never forces man as free subject to accept it, rather he invites man freely in co-operation with him to build up man himself as God’s child and his society. A man in God’s grace is for other and with other. A society, which is led by God’s grace, is a society, which builds up the respect of man’s dignity, a society of freedom, peace, solidarity, etc.

2.2 Social Dimension of Grace and the Purpose of Human Freedom²⁴²

²³⁹ Idem, *The Foundation of The Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 421.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 420

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 455.

As we know that state or social institutes do not give freedom, rather freedom is the God's gift. God creates free man, not to be alone, but for man to be with others: in communion with God, and then with his society where he lives in. God wants man who is a member of his society becomes "a community-building person"²⁴³. However, God never let man do things alone. There is always God's help, which we also call God's grace. In this point, we want to see the effect of grace to human freedom. So here, we raise the questions: What is the purpose of freedom? Is it right that the purpose of man's freedom is within God's grace to create graced social structures?²⁴⁴

2.2.1 Social Dimension of Grace and Man's Dignity

According to Karl Rahner, "dignity in general signifies the fact that a being has of its very nature a determined objective position...",²⁴⁵ but this determined objective position "demands respect and protection as well as realization, both in relations to others and in itself."²⁴⁶ Man's dignity is a "free gift of God, a grace and hence supernatural."²⁴⁷ Man is made in the image of God. Jesus Christ, God's self-communication in grace gives his life for man, and continues to accompany man by His Spirit. Man's dignity is the dignity of God's child in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Karl Rahner writes:

"The essential dignity of man consists in the fact that, within a sexually differentiated community in spatio-temporal history, man, by his spiritually recognizing himself and

²⁴³ Idem, *The Theological Investigations: Man in the Church*, II (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1963), p. 239.

²⁴⁴ Marilyn Sunderman, "Grace and Lived Christianity in the Theology of Karl Rahner and Leonardo Boff", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, V, 1/8 (2011), p. 281. www.ijhssnet.com. Accessed on March 23, 2012.

²⁴⁵ Idem, *Theological Investigations: Man in the Church*, II (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1963), p. 235-236.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 235-236.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235-236.

freely identifying himself, can and ought to open himself... to the love of Jesus Christ which communicates God himself.”²⁴⁸

Man is from God and directed towards God. For this, the dignity becomes very important to man’s life in society: “The dignity of nature is pre-appointed (*vor-gegeben*) to man for his free self-understanding.”²⁴⁹ It means that man’s dignity is a gift given by God from his birth; it is not something added after or by man’s request. It is “as the goal of his freedom, as its salvation or judgment.”²⁵⁰ So dignity of man’s nature is really based on the using or exercising of his free choice. Therefore, the dignity can “bring about his salvation or God’s judgment upon him.”²⁵¹ Man’s dignity includes two dimensions: *personal nature* and *supernatural existential*. The *personal nature* has different dimensions such as man is spirit, freedom, individual, community-building person, incarnate and mundane person.²⁵² The *supernatural existential* means “the person is called to personal communication with God in Christ” and to “the community-forming visible manifestation of this personal state of being directly called before God which is the Church.”²⁵³ This *supernatural existential* relates to the personal nature of man as a “gratuitous gift of God as grace.”²⁵⁴ Both of these dimensions (the natural and supernatural existence of man) are mutually determined together or they cannot be divorced from each other.²⁵⁵ “With the essence and this dignity of man”, says

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

Rahner, “there is given a plurality of human existential dimensions”: He is a corporeal-material living being; spiritual-personal, cultural being; religious, God centered being.²⁵⁶

Freedom is one of the manners of man’s dignity. Because of this, Karl Rahner says, “freedom is self-achievement of the person, using a finite material, before the infinite God.”²⁵⁷ With freedom, man can stand before God as a responsible agent and as a dialogue partner. Man knows himself as a person of freedom, but he is also a “community-building person.”²⁵⁸ He has a freedom of choice to build a community with other persons, first between God and men, second between persons in the same community together. In this community, man can be a “perfect person in the measure in which he opens himself in love and service for other persons.”²⁵⁹ Love and service for others, it is to prepare a good environment, which is against and opposite a sinful society. It makes no sense if man says he loves his neighbors, while he supports a sinful structural society where all the values of cultures, morality, etc. are uncounted.

Karl Rahner says:

“Anyone who receives grace in baptism by being incorporated into the Church as historical and social corporeality of grace of Christ...receives along with the grace of the church a share in, and the mandate and capacity for participating in, this function of the church to be the historical tangibility of God’s grace in the world.”²⁶⁰

Through baptism, man participates in the mission of Christ and the Church. This mission is not only for individual persons, but also for all as a whole of society. He becomes

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 239.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239-243.

²⁶⁰ Idem, *Foundation of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 414.

“a messenger of the word, a witness to the truth, and a representative of grace of Christ in the world.”²⁶¹

Looking at man’s dignity as understood by Karl Rahner, we find that God created man as a social person and he is the goal of God’s grace as well as a means for God’s social dimension of grace in society. We agreed that man’s life and his existence in both, natural and supernatural dimensions, are God’s grace. Therefore, man with his freedom, which is also a manner of his very person, can say no to cooperation with God’s grace to build up himself as social person, but once he freely says yes to God’s grace, he also becomes a means of grace for society. For this, the Church also teaches:

“All the social values are inherent in the dignity of the human person, whose authentic development they foster. Essentially, these values are truth, freedom, justice, love. Putting them into practice is the sure and necessary way of obtaining personal perfection and a more human social existence.”²⁶²

2.2.2 Social Dimension of Grace towards Building the State

In the effects of God’s grace, according to Karl Rahner, “the State must serve the personal dignity and freedom of man.”²⁶³ The German theologian means that the State is a “subsidiary social organization” and it must serve “the primitive and essential communities,”²⁶⁴ which are the foundation of the State and its society. If the State can keep these basic communities “healthy”, the whole State and its society are also “healthy”. We can call these primitive and essential communities “small societies”, such as:

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

²⁶² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Pauline Publications: Mumbai, 2005), No. 197.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

²⁶⁴ *Idem*, *Theological Investigations: Man in the Church*, II (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1963), p. 256.

“Marriage community, family, the clan, local and vocational communities, religious communities, communities arising from common good possession and creation of cultural goods, etc.”²⁶⁵

The State, says Karl Rahner, “does not grant original rights and scope for freedom of the individual and the smaller communities,”²⁶⁶ rather, it should “protect them and regulate and harmonize them with each other.”²⁶⁷ Here we find that, by the leading of God’s grace, the State realizes that it is not the author of rights, but it is just a servant of rights by defending the freedom of individuals. The first right, which an individual deserves to have is freedom. Freedom makes full responsible persons on the individual and social level. Freedom allows man as a person who can say “yes” or “no” to God’s grace, to build up his society or to destroy it. For this, the State cannot make itself to be a “totalitarian State in which every right of the individual is merely a concession granted by the apparatus of the State.”²⁶⁸ The totalitarian State, confirms Karl Rahner, is an immoral State. It is an evil State, which is against God’s grace and will. It is an enemy of freedom.

The State should allow its citizen to have “the effective use of his native rights and freedoms, even against the State itself.”²⁶⁹ Karl Rahner proposes that the State must give not only equal rights to everyone, but also *his* right.²⁷⁰ For this, the State should have “an independent administration of justice oriented by natural law,” which cannot “be replaced by the formal State laws.”²⁷¹ According to Rahner, there must be a principle, which the rulers of

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

the State should follow that they must listen to the voice of their conscience to “bow before and know themselves responsible to God and his law.”²⁷²

To defend the rights and freedom of its people both individual and social level, the State, says Karl Rahner, must accept a “universal and an equal suffrage in a formal democracy.”²⁷³ This way helps to maintain a right order of a State within just laws and rights, which are basic conditions to form the social values in a State. The democracy can bring a harmony and solidarity in society. As we know, that solidarity is “as a social principle and a moral virtue,”²⁷⁴ which lays its foundation on grace. The Church in her doctrine also teaches: “Solidarity must be seen above all in its value as moral virtue that determines the order of institutions.”²⁷⁵

To maintain a structure of solidarity in its society, the State should have some basic conditions to guarantee that the State protects man’s dignity and gives freedom for man to reach all the values, which man needs to have such as religious values, personal value, cultural values and social values, etc. One of the basic conditions, which is mentioned in *Gaudium et Spes* is: “Everything is considered from the starting point of the person and with a view to the person.”²⁷⁶ A society cannot be good, if in this society, man as a person is forgotten. “Society, its structures and development must be oriented towards ‘the progress of the human person.’”²⁷⁷ This society is lead by the grace of God. Society is not a vague concept, but it is a concrete structure, which is formed by the group of persons and their

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 257.

²⁷³ *Ibid.* , p. 257.

²⁷⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Pauline Publications: Mumbai, 2005), No. 192.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

complex relationships in God's grace, which reveals itself in the values of persons and their society.

Now we can conclude that man's dignity includes all the values in regard to which can be said: "The scale of values is the key to the notion of social grace."²⁷⁸ We call these values God's love or the gift of the Holy Spirit to human beings as a whole in their society. If we look at men as persons of unity between natural and supernatural dimensions, between individual and social dimensions, these persons will live in a society where they enjoy all religious values, personal values, cultural values, social values and vital values. All of these values are dependent on and mingle together in the human person and his society; one is as a condition of the other.²⁷⁹

Karl Rahner sees "Christian life precisely as a life of freedom."²⁸⁰ The freedom is a condition for man to reach all the values of society. In addition, freedom is "ultimately openness to everything, to everything without exception."²⁸¹ According to Rahner, true freedom is openness to God as the goal of man's salvation: "openness to absolute truth, to absolute love and to the absolute infinity of human life in its immediacy to the very reality which we call God."²⁸² Freedom truly implies in itself a social meaning, "freedom is always the freedom of a subject who exists in interpersonal communication with other subjects."²⁸³

²⁷⁸ Robert M. Doran, "Social Grace and the Mission of the World," Lonerganresource, (Online Publications: Marquette University, 2010), p. 1, <http://www.lonerganresource.com/pdf/contributors/Doran>. Accessed on April 4, 2012.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1-2.

²⁸⁰ Idem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 402.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 402.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Freedom is always leading by the grace of God not merely to build the present structure of the society based on human dignity, but also giving a new hope for the future.

2.3 The Social Dimension of Grace in The Context of Collective Eschatology

We have already discussed the social dimension of grace and man's dignity, and man's dignity combines two elements: nature and supernatural. These elements cannot be separated from each other. When Rahner discusses "the one eschatology as collective eschatology,"²⁸⁴ he begins his argument from the angle of anthropology. He also comes up with the idea that man is as a whole plurality. According to Rahner, the anthropological dimension is as a necessity of collective statements. We now see how Rahner defends his point of view.

2.3.1 The History of Mankind in God's Full Self-Communication²⁸⁵

As we have just mentioned, Karl Rahner leads us to a collective eschatology from the anthropological point of view. For this, he writes:

"Man as a corporeal, historical reality and man as transcendental, personal spirit; man as an individual and man as a member of the human race, as a member of a collective reality; man as spiritual person and man as a reality to whom there necessarily belongs a world as milieu and environment in which he actualizes his existence: all of these phrases in their plurality are presuppositions for eschatological statements."²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Idem, *The Foundation of The Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 444.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

What Karl Rahner wants to suggest here is that there is a necessity for an individual and collective eschatology go together as one reality. They are not “two disparate realities,” rather both are united in the “concrete person himself.”²⁸⁷ Karl Rahner says:

“The fulfillment of this concrete person cannot be expressed in any other way except by his being regarded *both* as an element in a human collectivity and in the world *and so* as an ever unique and incalculable person who cannot be reduced to the world and to society.”²⁸⁸

Hence, if the fulfillment of person only takes place in his eschatological day, man is an individual eschatology that “cannot be separated from man as a corporeal, historical being and as a member of a collective world.”²⁸⁹ This is understandable when we go back to the dignity of man. One element, which makes man a social being, is that man bears some created characters of God the creator. The human person lives in relationship with others and the world. Therefore, Karl Rahner concludes that “the eschatology of the concrete, individual person can be complete only if we also develop collective eschatology.”²⁹⁰ This means that the historical person is always a part of the collective history of the world. For this, Rahner continues:

“As a whole, the history of the world, the history of spirit, and the history of salvation and its opposite is a one-directional history moving towards its final and definitive validity, and hence that it is not a history continuing on into infinity.”²⁹¹

According to Karl Rahner, one day, the history of the human race and the history of the world and the universal cosmos as whole will reach an end as a fulfillment of all in God’s self-communication. This also matches with Karl Rahner’s theory of Christology and

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

evolution: “The Christian professes in his Faith that all things – heaven and earth, the material and the spiritual world – are the creation of one and the same God,”²⁹² who is God’s self-communication in grace; and with God’s grace, they are moving toward their goal, which is also God himself as God’s full self-communication.

Looking to the future in the collective eschatological view, we find meaning for human life as whole. This helps us to understand human beings as social-building persons. If we do not look at the eschatology as a collective eschatology, it is hard for us to explain man as social-building person. Because if man just lives in his society and in the world for a short time, and then this society and its history goes its own way (without an end), and man also goes his own way (within an end), why then should he spend time, talent and his efforts to build up this society and this world? If we only think about the last day of our life as the day when we escape from this suffering and incomplete world, then we cannot catch up our Christian eschatology of the Kingdom of God.

Once again, Karl Rahner confirms that “the absolute future of man and of man’s history is God himself as origin of its dynamism and its goal.”²⁹³ The true future of human persons and the history of human race are moving to the triumphant day of our Lord, Jesus Christ, God’s self-communication.

2.3.2 Social Dimension of Grace in The Context of Kingdom Of God.

According to Karl Rahner, “Jesus’ message about God’s Kingdom [is] the definitive proclamation of salvation.”²⁹⁴ Once mentioning the word Kingdom, we cannot think of it, as

²⁹² Idem, *The Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, V (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1966), p. 161.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

an unclear notion, an ambiguous concept or metaphysic term, but it should be a reality, although we have not yet completely known it. If we agree with Karl Rahner that Jesus' message of the Kingdom is the definitive proclamation of salvation, then the Kingdom of God must begin with human life, in human society. Because salvation is for human beings and human beings are not out of space and time. They are living in the world. Human beings are social community. John Fuellbach in agreement with Karl Rahner, writes:

“The kingdom of God is incarnated in history, in human society and in the world. Although it is not purely and simply identical with the world, it is “identifiable” in the world. We may also say that the Kingdom shows itself in society and is encountered in society, but this society is not the Kingdom.”²⁹⁵

In the first chapter, we discussed Jesus Christ who is God's self-communication, true grace and salvation in Karl Rahner's theology. Furthermore, Jesus Christ, God's self-communication to humankind and the world, truly incarnated into the world and lived among man. If Jesus Christ is grace and salvation, he himself must be “an inseparable connection between the closeness of God's Kingdom preached by Jesus as *new* and his “person.”²⁹⁶ Therefore, when we mention the Kingdom of God, we cannot separate it from Jesus Christ himself who is the “Good News,”²⁹⁷ which is the main message of the Kingdom. More than that, “he proclaims the Good News not just by what he says or does, but by what he is.”²⁹⁸ Jesus Christ is the absolute Savior of human beings and the world and he is the grace, the Good News and the salvation of all humankind and the world, he himself is the center of the Kingdom of God.

²⁹⁵ John Fuellenbach, *The Church Community for the Kingdom*, (Logos Publications: Manila, 2001), P. 24.

²⁹⁶ Idem, *The Foundation of The Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (Crossroad: New York, 1978), p. 252.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

The Church is the mystical body of Christ, says Karl Rahner, which is “animated by the Holy Spirit.”²⁹⁹ Although Karl Rahner does not identify the visible Church with the Kingdom of God, rather he sees the visible Church is the start of the long process towards the triumphant Kingdom, yet he assures that the Kingdom of God “has already begun here on earth in the form of the pilgrim Church.”³⁰⁰ In the first chapter, we showed how Karl Rahner considers the Church as the social mediation of the salvation of God. Here Karl Rahner leads us to a new dimension of the Church as the inauguration of God’s Kingdom. When having discussed about prayer, Rahner has written:

“In so far as these individuals are members of this Kingdom of God, which has already begun here on earth in the form of the pilgrim Church and which nevertheless embraces all the elect, God grants them actual (efficacious) graces for prayer (naturally always according to His pleasure whereby He himself establishes this eternal Kingdom in its manifold variety.)”³⁰¹

Therefore, the Church is the inaugural, visible, social and historical reality of the Kingdom of God in the world. In other words, the Church is “the sacrament of the Kingdom of God in the eschatological phase of sacred history which began with Christ, the phase which brings about the Kingdom of God.”³⁰² Karl Rahner also reminds us that the Kingdom of God happens within the pilgrim Church, but the boundary of this Kingdom is much larger than the visible Church itself. “As long as history lasts,” says Karl Rahner, “the [visible] Church will not be identical with the kingdom of God, for the latter is only definitely present

²⁹⁹ Idem, *The Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, V (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1966), p. 429.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

³⁰² John Fuellenbach, *The Church: Community For The Kingdom of God*, (Logos Publications: Manila, 2001), p. 113.

when history ends with the coming of Christ and the last judgment.”³⁰³ Karl Rahner emphasizes:

“The Kingdom of God itself is coming to be in the history of the world (not only that in the [visible] Church) wherever obedience to God occurs in grace as the acceptance of God’s self-communication.”³⁰⁴

Someone who supports the idea of the Kingdom of God as identified with the Church may misunderstand Karl Rahner in this point, but truly Rahner is never against identifying the Church with the Kingdom of God. He is only against identifying the visible Church alone with the Kingdom of God. To clarify this, Karl Rahner distinguishes the visible Church and the mystical Body of Christ, which includes an invisible part. The Church as mystical Body of Christ is much larger than the visible Church itself. Actually, Karl Rahner has the idea that all the righteous people who do not belong explicitly and visibly to the visible Church must be considered as belonging. He founds his reasoning on the ground of the Church considered as the Mystical Body of Christ:

“We are commanded [by the *magisterium*] to identify the terms ‘Mystical Body of Christ’ and ‘Catholic Church’. If we keep to this terminology, then only those people can be said to ‘say prayers’ in and with the ‘Mystical Body of Christ’ who are also ‘visibly’ members of the Church (i.e. by baptism, external profession of the true faith and subjection to the authority of the Church), but not those who do not belong to the visible structure of the Church, even though they are justified (and perhaps even baptized). Nevertheless even such justified pagans and baptized non-Catholic Christians of good will (who for this reason may be regarded as justified) belong in *some* true sense to the Church.”³⁰⁵

By understanding the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, Rahner truly opens the boundary of the Church much larger than with the official Church (those who officially are

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

³⁰⁵ Idem, *Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, V (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1966), p. 425.

baptized in the Church). This encourages the Church and her official children to get closer with the outside world, for everyone can be a 'potential or anonymous Christian'. This also encourages our Catholic Church to dialogue with the other religions and cultures. It is not only because of the duty of love of our neighbors, but we should also co-operate with the Holy Spirit of Christ, the grace of God's self-communication, to bring fully in the Church all those who are still 'potential or anonymous Christians'. Doing this, the Church maintains her character as "universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48) or as "instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity."³⁰⁶ She is really "the eschatological and efficacious manifestation (sign) in redemptive history that in the unity, activity, fraternity, ect, of the world, the Kingdom of God is at hand."³⁰⁷

Therefore, from the collectively eschatological point of view, Rahner shows us that God's grace always leads human beings and the history of the world to its common goal in building up the Kingdom of God. Human beings were born into the society and are belonging to that society and they work together to build up their society, which is also earthly Kingdom of God. Individualism seems not to fit in the collective eschatology and Kingdom of God. In our daily life, each one of us needs God's grace to fulfill our daily duty, but it is not only for our personal future. Rather, God's grace helps us to build up, to live, to dream and to hope for the Kingdom of God as a collective eschatology. In this way, the social dimension of grace is clearly more than ever.

³⁰⁶ John Fuellenbach, *The Church: Community For The Kingdom of God*, (Logos Publications: Manila, 2001), p. 104.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.113.

Conclusion

Karl Rahner truly offers to us a new way to approach God's grace. In Karl Rahner's theology, we find that God's grace always bears the social dimension. This social dimension of grace is nothing else than God Himself as God's self-communication who constantly self-communicates with human beings and the world.

First, God's self-communication is the cause of the creation. The act of creation is an act of freedom and of grace. By this act of love, human beings come to reality and history. God made man in his likeness in order to be in communication with God and with others. In the deepest of man's personal dignity, God places there a freedom, but it is a freedom of social-building responsibility. God does not create man to be alone, as God who is never lonely in Trinitarian God. God wants man to become a social-building person. God's self-communication (grace) is always an active agent in building human beings' society.

Second, God's self-communication is salvation. God did not create human beings as passive objects to satisfy his love; rather God makes them as other subjects. They are free to response to the love of God. The fall of human beings is a proof of this freedom. Nevertheless, because of the fall, human beings have chance to witness God's self-communication who become one among them in Jesus Christ. The act of salvation is an act of "re-creation" (restoration). This act of restoration is also God's act of salvation, of love and of grace. The act of salvation truly "socializes itself" in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Christ, human beings and the world find themselves as new creatures.

Third, God's self-communication reveals himself as a social dimension of grace in the Church. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, human beings are participated in building the Kingdom of God; it is also the Kingdom of grace. God's self-communication in Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit continually acts in the Church. Through the Church, God's grace socially and publicly reaches to human beings as whole. The process of salvation reaches its highest point in Jesus Christ, but it is continuing within the Church (as Christ's Mystical Body) until his coming back.

Fourth, God's self-communication is a goal and an active agent for union of humankind in one family with God. Through Baptism and Confirmation, the Church, on behalf of Christ, gives us a power and commission to build up the Kingdom of God here on the earth. Within the Church, whole human beings and their history are moving towards a collective future, which Rahner calls the collective eschatology in which human beings are in full communion with God and others.

Karl Rahner's theology of grace, particularly with its social dimension, opens way for Catholic missionaries and all of her other members to commit their life for mission in doing charity and other social works as the task of "love of our neighbors." For wherever they go, whatever they do, they do not act alone, but Jesus Christ, God's self-communication through his Holy Spirit, goes ahead of them. Jesus Christ, God's self-communication with all human beings and the world becomes the causes of good works and all conversions of human beings, even these good works and conversions happen outside the visible Church and in other religions. This way of understanding also helps Christians to believe that the salvation merely comes from Jesus Christ, although it may happen in different forms, places and times. All of these good works and conversions are influenced by the same grace of Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, Karl Rahner's theology of social dimension of grace denies the individualism and moral relativism. First, no one can stand alone in this world; rather a person is always in communion with God and with others. Second, human beings come from the absolute and perfect love (God's self-communication) and they are going back to be in full communion with this absolute and perfect love. Therefore, all of the human values such as culture, morality, politic, sociality, vitality, etc., must also be measured in the absolute and perfect love. Human beings cannot take themselves as measure of the values. God alone is measure of all.

The understanding God's grace as God's self-communication allows the Church to take initiative to dialogue with all of cultures, religions and the whole world, for the dialogue is an essence of the Church as a social mediation of grace rooted in God Himself. Dialogue means that the Church opens the door and let God's grace flows more richly to every corner of the world. Dialogue also means that the Church "runs after" the Holy Spirit of Christ to measure the boundary of the Kingdom of God enlarged by the Holy Spirit and to welcome more new citizen of the Kingdom into the Church. The social dimension of grace forms person and group of persons to work for the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

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